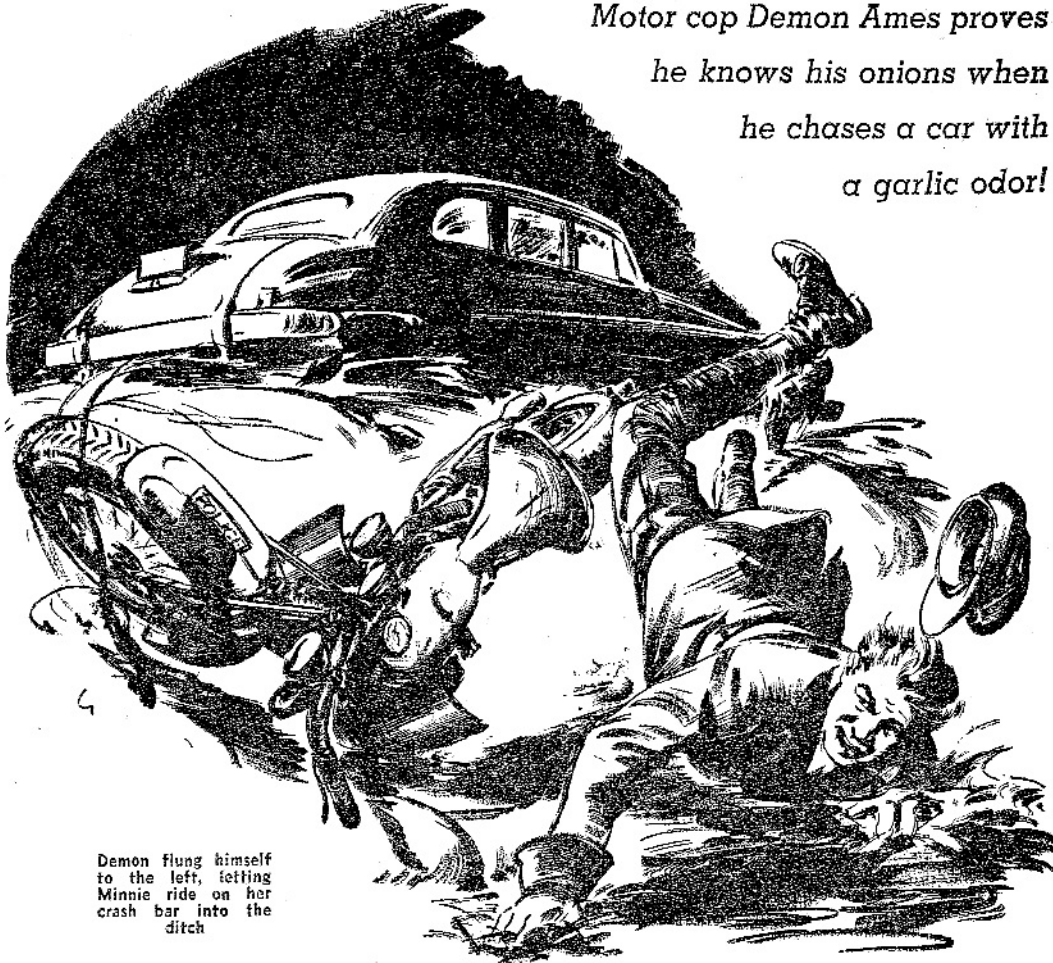


*Motor cop Demon Ames proves
he knows his onions when
he chases a car with
a garlic odor!*



Demon flung himself to the left, letting Minnie ride on her crash bar into the ditch

A Breath of Suspicion

By STEWART STERLING

It really was one devil of a night, "Demon" Ames told himself bitterly. Stinging cold, pitch black—with a gale from the Adirondacks to whip freezing rain off the lake with biting force. Just the kind of night a gun-crazy killer would pick to blast his way free from the Great Meadow pen.

Bad enough for the Demon himself to have to be out in this devil's brew of sleet and slush—a lot worse for Minnie, his motorcycle, to be here with him. He should have come without her. The ole gal wasn't used to this rugged exposure. It

wouldn't take much to lay her up for a few days. He patted her rear, consolingly.

"We'll stick it out five minutes more, Minnie." He pulled up the cuff of his sheep-lined jacket to glance at the radium dial on his wrist. "If we don't pick up any scent by ten o'clock, we'll scoot back to barracks. This Medini gunned his way out of that mess hall at suppertime. Say around six-thirty. Comstocks' seventy-five miles south of here. If the creep is making his getaway in anything speedier'n an ox cart, he'd be long gone past Crown Point, hours ago."

He broke an icicle off Minnie's tail light; removed one leather mitten, warmed the lens to dissolve the film of sleet. Across the road, the three red flares he'd set out flickered fitfully in the gusts lashing westward from the Champlain bridge along NY 46—died momentarily to thin scarlet tongues tasting the witches' broth of swirling air, ice and water.

There'd been no traffic for his one-man road block to halt, anyhow, the last half-hour. It was too early for the big sixteen-wheelers thundering through freight up from the south—too late for stray vans or empty tank trucks to be rumbling down US 9 from Plattsburg up north. And nobody with sense enough to shift gears would be crossing the lake into Vermont in weather as foul as this.

The Demon would have put out the flares an hour ago, except his was the last road block between Comstock and the border. If Medini, by any combination of luck and ruthlessness, should get past this point, he might escape clear to Canada.

But the killer would figure the state troopers would expect him to make a dash for the line. Naturally he wouldn't try to run the blockade by the most direct route. It was silly for the Demon to be freezing his whiskers like this, waiting for nothing. Even supposing Medini was heading this way, the Demon had no idea what the getaway car would look like. And not too much of a picture of Medini.

All the shortwave had given out was a staccato description: — Five-nine, hundred fifty, thirty years, black hair, dark eyes, narrow face, long nose, small mouth, olive skin, no scars, voice high and squeaky.

He wouldn't be wearing any striped con suit by now, obviously. A hat would be covering that clipped prison haircut. Most likely he'd timed his break to synchronize with outside help, so there'd

be somebody with him—maybe *several* somebodies. Trooper Demon Ames touched his holster by way of reassurance, but the odds were against his needing the .45 tonight.

The troop's patrol at Whitehall, down at the foot of the lake, would use a fine-toothed comb on everything bigger'n a tricycle that tried to roll northward tonight.

The sheriff's deputies from Glens Falls and the town constables at Ticonderoga would flag down everything that came *their* way in case the Whitehall check missed. There really wasn't any sense in the Demon's putting on this solo patrol at a godforsaken crossroads that even the Greyhounds avoided.

"It's my own fat-headed fault, Minnie." He revved her motor in apology; she answered with a surly backfire. "I know. *I* know. No trooper is required to take his motorcycle out in rain or snow, unless he volunteers to risk his skull. That's what the book says." He slapped mittens against puttees to beat blood into his chilled fingers.

"If I hadn't been hellbent on squaring myself with the Cap, I'd be warming my feet back at barracks right now—waiting to go out on relief in one of those cozy patrol cars. Yeah. An' you'd be toasting your mudguards against that big radiator in the garage."

He pushed his goggles up under the brim of his pinseal cap to squint at distant yellow eyes which winked blurrily at the crest of the hill to the south.

There were no top lights; it wasn't a truck. The eyes disappeared, took a count of seven to reappear after the dip. That meant the vehicle would be traveling about thirty-five. Probably some farmer bringing the family back from the movies at Ti.

Well, it would be a relief to talk to somebody besides Minnehaha. He'd

welcome anything. Anything except another stolen heap that might get past him and give him another black mark in the Ole Man's book.

CAP Matthews would reduce him to making up barrack bunks if he slipped up on another "Wanted" car. The blistering scorn of his superior still reddened the Demon's ears. He could remember the Captain's vitriolic remarks even if he couldn't manage to memorize all the license numbers on the Hot List:

Called you the 'Demon' when you were burning up those motordromes, did they, Ames? Sizzling stuff in those pace races, huh? Hell on wheels stunting up those hill-climb tests? Maybe so, maybe so. But let me tell you something. You may be able to ride that Indian of yours over anything except a lake but you'll still be a pain in the padukas in this troop unless you can speed up your gray matter when necessary.

"We need men who can remember from one day to the next that there's an alarm out for a black '46 Chevvy with Jersey pads and a crumpled left front wing. If you can't keep the license numbers in mind, if you haven't brains enough to check your list, we'll give you a new name around these barracks, trooper. We won't call you Demon. Around here you'll answer to Dumb One, Ames."

He'd been set to scrubbing down the patrol jeeps on account of letting that Chevvy get by him. Cap Matthews hadn't even assigned him to a patrol unit when the news of this jail break at Comstock had flashed in on the shortwave. The Demon had taken a deep burn at that. When the last of the troop had grabbed Thompsons from the armory racks and piled into the cars, he'd protested angrily.

The Captain had seemed surprised, had stared coldly at him, through him, before

swiveling around to the district map. "If you think you'd be able to remember this Medini's description for more than five minutes"—his pencil had touched the intersection of US 9 and NY 46 on the big scale roadmap—"you might be of some use here. If this murderer slips through the net at Whitehall, that'd be the only place we could pin him in, between here and the border. North of there, there'd be a dozen routes he could take.

"But I haven't anyone to send with you. And I can't order you to take your cyke out on a night like this. If you go, you're strictly on your own."

Naturally, under the circumstances, there had been only one thing for the Demon to say. He'd saluted smartly and said it. Had slithered his Indian sweetheart over nineteen slush-greasy miles to set out his solitary road-block. A gesture, to show his willingness to be a good trooper. And what would he get out of it? The sniffles.

The headlights of the approaching car slowed, a couple hundred yards down the road. The Demon switched on his blinker and his headlight, kicked down the rest-bar, dismounted. He grabbed his flash, moved into the thin wedge of white light so the driver could see his puttees, and made a "Come Ahead" gesture with the flashlight.

The car moved up, slowed, stopped a dozen yards from the row of flares. A girl cranked down the window beside the wheel, leaned out anxiously. The Demon pushed up his ear flaps to hear her.

"What is it, officer? Road under repair?"

It was a two-tone green '47 Buick four-door she was driving. Even under its coating of ice it was glossy, shiny with bright chrome. Maryland pads VR 21-744. The Demon couldn't recall any such car on the Hot List at the moment. But he didn't have time to take out his mimeo

sheet and check, now. There was something more important. He walked over; the girl seemed to be alone.

“Just checking licenses, Miss. See yours, please?”

She frowned, irritated. She would have been right pretty, he thought, if it wasn't for the scowl. Curly blond hair, sort of a pert, snub nose and a mouth that was certainly intended for better things than being turned down petulantly at the corners. He couldn't tell, about her figure under the beaver coat, but she looked like the sort of cutie somebody'd buy this kind of car for.

“Here.” She fumbled in her bag, produced a celluloid case, handed it through the window.

It was a blue Maryland license. One of those lifetime issuances. *Kathryn F. Caudle*, it read. #938363, 21 McCormick Ave., Baltimore. Underneath were cryptic symbols: *W. F. 5/4122-1923*. It seemed to check. She was white and female, all right—that *Nuit de Passion* or whatever she used on her hair was very, very, feminine, the Demon decided. She would weigh around a hundred twenty or so, yeah. And she didn't appear to be more than twenty-five.

He gave the license back. “Which way you going, Miss?” He opened the rear door casually, peered in.

“Lake Placid. Where do I turn for Ausable?”

“Westport. Ten miles beyond Port Henry.” He felt beneath the plaid blanket on the floor behind the front seat. Something lumpy was hidden under the blanket. It was a suitcase and a duffel bag.

“My ski stuff,” she said crossly. “If I ever get to Placid without skiing off the road.”

“I'll help you put your chains on, if you want.”

“No thanks!” Was he imagining it, or

was there a sudden panic in her voice? “They make such a horrible racket when the highway is clear of snow.”

“Yeah. Car skidding into a telegraph pole doesn't sound very sweet, either.” He guessed he'd been wrong. He was looking for trouble and expected to find it even where there wasn't any.

He grinned and it made his homely, wide-mouthed face attractive in a weather-reddened fashion. She smiled back at him, amiably. He closed the rear door, vaguely uneasy about something—annoyed with himself that he couldn't put a name to it.

What was there about this dame and her shiny new bus that bothered him?! “They'll have chains at Hoffman's Garage at Westport, if you change your mind.”

“I might.” She blinked long lashes provocatively. “I do, sometimes. Play it safe, that's my motto.”

“Good motto. Good night.” He waved her on, watched the Buick's purplish tail lights dwindle into the darkness up US 9, slow momentarily at the curve an eighth of a mile ahead, disappear. He splashed back to his machine with a disturbed feeling that all was not according to Hoyle in that setup.

“I'm getting gidgety as an ole woman, Minnie. Just because the Cap bawls me out.” Suppose he'd made that girl get out and unlock the trunk compartment for inspection. She'd have had a right to raise a smell that would really get him a bawling—*Wait!*

SMELL! That was it! He'd caught a good, strong whiff of garlic when he'd opened that rear door.

And the girl had been wearing perfume, so it couldn't have come from her or he'd never have noticed the garlic.

Garlic. Italian cooking. Medini. The Demon wondered. Of course a lot of people besides Italians *did* like garlic. To

be sure the odor of those powerful little cloves could hang around clothing or, say a blanket, for quite a while. And the Demon had no certain knowledge that they ever cooked with the onion's little brother down at the Comstock penitentiary.

"Urgent! All patrols! . . . Urgent, Urgent!! All patrols!!" Minnie was sputtering a warning. He tuned up her one-way. "Special to Units Seven, Fourteen and Twenty-two. . . !" The Demon's heart hammered. Twenty-two was Trooper Damon Ames!! "Special to Units Seven, Fourteen, Twenty-two. Fatal shooting on US 9 two miles south Crown Point at Wistor's Grocery about fifteen minutes ago. Proprietor killed. No details except murderer escaped in car."

Brad Wistor, the Demon muttered. The roly-poly little guy who would never take a nickel from a trooper for sodas or an apple. A harmless ole Humpty Dumpty with a heart as big as his fat stomach. Chopped down in cold blood.

"No identification of attacker. Halt all cars moving away from area, bring to Crown Point for questioning."

He kicked up the rest-stand, slewed out in the highway. He'd stop the one car that was moving away from the area past *his* block, or bust a few of Minnie's spokes.

Fifteen minutes ago? He was four miles north of Crown Point. Four and two made six miles. Just about right for a Buick traveling thirty-five.

She didn't look like a kid who might have gunned out a friendly ole geek like Brad. But she might not have been alone in that car. There *might* have been someone hidden in that trunk compartment. Someone who liked garlic.

It was only the merest breath of suspicion, but it was all he had to go on.

He gave Minnie the spurs, got up to seventy on the straightaway. Then he saw

the swinging red light at the grade crossing.

A wild wail of approaching danger shrilled from the locomotive—another.

He twisted Minnie's tail into fourth speed; the pickup nearly left him sitting flat in the slush. His Indian baby could do a hundred and ten on dry ground. He kept his eyes off the speedometer as he roared into the crossing.

It was one of those long freights clattering toward Schenectady and the west. He could beat it to the grade crossing.

Fifty feet from the oscillating red glare he saw the headlight coming from the opposite direction. The Montreal express coming like a bat.

He could slide Minnie through a lot of tight places where a car wouldn't be able to squeeze by—but he couldn't ride the cinders between two trains. He wrenched the handlebars blindly, rocketed off the road onto the side of the railroad embankment.

For one heart-stopping moment Minnie's momentum carried them sliding and slipping right up the grade into the white beam of the express train's headlight. There was a bedlam of frantic whistles, the scream of steel brakes biting into steel, the hiss of escaping steam.

Then he was bouncing and jouncing along beside the cab. An instantaneous glimpse of the peak-capped engineer. The orange flash of the firebox. A cloud of blinding vapor. He jerked on the chromium reins again. Minnie plunged down the embankment, hit the gully, threw him.

He spraddled her again, hobbled through a briar thicket into a dump of tin cans and rusty wire, circled back to the road.

"Hate to dish it out to you so raw, Minnie. But you got to expect a few

scratches at roundup time.”

He might be held up another couple of minutes by the freight; with the time he'd already lost, the chick in the Buick might have a two or three-mile lead. It wouldn't make any difference until she got to some cross-road where she could switch off and leave him guessing which way she'd gone. But that would only be ten miles away at Port Henry.

Now that he'd had a few seconds to mull it over, he was pretty sure he wasn't up against any dumb Dora. Except for that spasmodic indication of panic when he'd suggested getting chains out of the trunk compartment, she'd played the part of a typical traveler made grouchy by villainous driving conditions.

The more he chewed on it, the less certain he was that there had been anyone in that luggage compartment of her car. He remembered—now that it was too late—the momentary slowing a few hundred yards before she got to his roadblock. That could have given a man like Medini plenty of opportunity to open one of the rear doors and drop out into the darkness. She'd have closed the door before she came on to answer the Demon's beckoning “Come ahead.”

Then she'd slowed again, up the road, thirty seconds or so after he waved her through. The time he'd spent questioning her would give an active man enough leeway to circle around in the blackness and cut back to the road so she could pick him up on the north side of the road-block. *That* would explain the stench of garlic!

The one bloodshot eye of the caboose loomed into view. Minnie hurdled the tracks close enough for the Demon to have grabbed the brakeman's lantern off the rear end. He bent low behind the windshield, slurring over on the curves, his blinker light winking furiously as he tore along the deserted road.

If that blond *bambina* was Medini's gal, there'd be a shortwave in the dash of that Buick. She'd know the news of Bud Wistor's shooting was being broadcast over the countryside. She'd not be loafing along at thirty-five now, glare ice or not. With any luck, she'd tear into Port Henry ahead of him. There wouldn't be anyone there to stop her; no troopers, no deputies—and the lone cop wouldn't be on the job this time of night.

It was even steeper she'd get through the sleepy little burg without anyone knowing which of the two possible routes she'd chosen north from the fork at the village green. There wouldn't be any tire marks to show the Demon which way she'd gone, either. Even if he'd taken pains to notice what kind of treads she had on her 6.50 x 16s, the Port Henry streets were black asphalt. They held the sun's heat longer than the white concrete of US 9—and the sleet would melt soon as it hit them.

One route went to Plattsburg and Rouses Point—the border. The other, to Ausable and ski country. She'd told him she was going to Placid. She'd expect him to think she was trying to throw him off the trail. He decided she *would* head for Placid. *Via* the Ausable fork.

It wasn't quite a toss-up. If she laid her course due north, there'd be another ninety miles in which to catch her—and whoever the garlic-eater was, with her. If she took the Placid route, the Demon knew a short cut that would save him five or six miles and possibly—just possibly—bring him back into the highway ahead of her to cut her off.

It wasn't a road he'd have picked for Minnie to negotiate on a slick night. It was steep, narrow and as full of curves as a spiral staircase. But it was shorter.

He passed an ambulance going full clip—lost the long white car in his rear-

view mirror within half a mile. Port Henry was a flash-bulb view of huddled stores, one lighted building—the engine house.

A DOG raced alongside him as he swerved into the Ausable-Placid road at the green, nipped at his heels. He twisted the throttle grip, startled the dog into a backflip. Three miles out of town, at the foot of the mountain, he swung right, began to climb.

He hobbled and straddle-walked up the steepest part, hopped and joggled to brake his speed on the precipitous down pitch. Halfway down he let Minnie feel her gas on a looping U-curve, realized his mistake the instant he saw the faint amber gleam of a lantern bobbling along in the middle of the narrow road.

A chicken wagon, going to the freight shed at Westport—two ancient Percherons hauling a cart piled high, wide and handsome with crates full of clucking hens.

There was no room to pass, no time if there had been room. He pulled onto the shoulder. There wasn't any shoulder. It was a ditch, full of water, frozen over. Like stepping on a piece of soap in the bathtub!

Minnie slipped sideways, kept going in spite of the power the Demon poured to her. They went off the road, through the remnants of a low rail fence, into a plowed field saw-toothed with ruts. The Demon took a header.

The farmer on the chicken truck swore at him. The horses shied. The chickens made the night hideous. Minnie backfired like a three-inch rapid fire.

The Demon wiped the blood off his nose, spat out a mouthful of dirt, made sure no bones were broken. Then he lifted Minnie, examined her with more care than he had himself. She had a bent crashguard and a smashed headlight. But her wheels

were in alignment. She would take him where he had to go.

He dragged her back to the road, lit out again. When he hit the Placid through highway, he saw a wrecker towing a Model T coupe that had mashed its radiator against a narrow bridge.

“Seen a green ‘47 Buick sedan come past, last few minutes?”

“Ain't seen a single soul,” the garageman answered. “Not for the last half-hour.”

The Demon whacked Minnie's gas tank. “We've caught her,” he whispered. “We've got her in a trap.”

But before he'd covered two miles toward Port Henry he was mentally booting himself. The Buick couldn't have been more'n five or six miles ahead of him before he shot up over that short cut. By now, the girl would have caught up with him, even counting the time he'd saved on the cut-off.

Maybe she'd had a blowout or something. Maybe.

More likely she'd crossed him up, taken the straight road to the border. Nothing for the Demon to do but find a phone and report in.

He didn't like the idea much. When Cap Matthews found the Buick had slipped through the bottleneck, one goose would be cooked. For keeps!

“Whoa!” He scuffed to a drag stop.

A dirt road branched off at a sharp angle, almost paralleling the highway back toward Port Henry. A signboard at the turn said *Trout Landing—Lake Resorts*. The signboard glistened.

He dismounted, touched it. It was wet. Spattered slush that even now was freezing, silvering like Christmas tinsel.

The sign was at least twelve feet off the concrete. The car that had splashed slush as far and wide as that must have been taking the turn at fairly high speed.

The gruel of sleet and water on the roadbed wasn't deep enough to have sprayed to that distance if the vehicle had kept to the straightaway.

The Demon used his flash on the cement. A car *had* slurred around there. In a three-quarter circle. The marks of the tires hadn't been obliterated by the steady sleet, either. They'd been 6.50s, he figured.

The stuff splashed on the sign would have frozen solid if it had been there more than a few minutes. If the car was the Buick, it couldn't be far ahead. Quite an "if," he realized.

He nosed Minnie along cautiously. Around a bend lurid neons quivered in a St. Vitus invitation:

ONE-EYED JACK'S
Grill & Bar
Fill Up Ur Car

The vibrating vermilion illuminated a half-dozen parked cars—but no '47 Buick.

Beyond were gas pumps, a glow of bluish fluorescence. In the garage a man in a mackinaw lay on his back under the sedan with the Maryland pads.

"Little trouble?" The Demon saw no sign of the girl.

"Chains." The man swore wearily. "Lady oughta be chained up herself, if she insists on driving tonight."

"Where is she?" The man rolled out from under. "Eatin', I s'pose. Anything wrong?"

"Just checking." He couldn't say more, with only a whiff of garlic to go on, could he? "Use your phone?"

"Right there. Help 'self."

The Demon got through to headquarters. Cap Matthews wasn't there. Russ Drake was on the board. He repeated the message, as per regulations.

"Ten-seventeen peeyem, Trooper

Ames calling from Port Henry fower two, One-Eyed Jack's,"—hey, that sounds like a wild joint, Demon—"escorting to Cee Point green '47 Buick sedan Maryland VR 21 dash 744, owner Catherine—oh, K as in Kokomo, huh?—Caudle, Baltimore, EmDee, driving, for investigation Wistor case. No one else in car. Right?"

"Think so, Russ." If there was anyone else in the car, he'd know pretty quick! "Anything on that Comstock break?"

"Yair. Medini was reported driving a '40 or '41 Ford station wagon through Mechanicville toward Albany, ten minutes ago. Guess he figured the northern routes were too hot."

"Must have." Medini—sixty miles south, ten minutes ago! That was that. So much for garlic! "I'll call in from the Point, Russ." He hung up.

He'd have to go easy with the girl, now. Wasn't a thing to connect her with Brad's murder.

She'd come the route she told him she meant to. She'd even followed his advice about the chains. And if there had been anything—or anyone—in that trunk compartment, would she go into the cafe and leave the car like this?

As far as that slowing down before she hit the roadblock, and afterwards, anyone might do that in weather that was only fit for a walrus. She'd said she believed in playing it safe.

HE WENT in the cafe. She perched on a stool at the lunch counter, nylons neatly crossed. When he took the adjoining seat, she recognized him, smiled.

"The nice cop." Then she frowned. "Say, you hurt yourself!"

"My girl scratched me." He watched her carefully—no sign of alarm at all. "She plays rough sometimes."

"Anybody'd think—" she laughed at

him over the rim of a thick, white mug—"you were following me."

"I was." He ordered Old Black Joe.

"Should I be flattered? Or frightened?"

"They just want to ask you some questions back at Crown Point."

She set her cup down slowly. "Who does?"

"Police."

"What about?" She began to be indignant.

"A murder."

The hamburger she'd started to bite remained suspended an inch from her lips—her mouth stayed open. "I don't understand! Are you arresting me? What for? What happened?"

"Guy got shot down there tonight."

The garlic hadn't been on her breath, in that was one sure thing. She smelled nice and kind of exciting. "Little while before you drove past my post. They want to find out if you saw anybody who might have done it."

"For Pete's sake! How would I know who did it! I don't even know who was killed!"

"They'll tell you all about it." He stirred sugar in his black coffee. "You stop in Crown Point at all?"

"Not even for a traffic light. No. Not until you stopped me."

"Happen to notice a little grocery store couple miles the other side of town? Wistor's?"

"No, I didn't. And I don't see why I have to—"

"Orders, that's why. Hope you don't mind driving back."

"Certainly I mind. I mind plenty!"

"Sorry. You'll come back, anyway."

She banged the hamburger on her plate, exasperated. "I don't even know if there's a decent hotel in Crown Point where I can stay."

"They'll find a place for you somewhere." He left it at that, laid a quarter on the counter. "Take your time. I'll be out at the car."

"Imagine! *Wouldn't* this happen to me!" She eyed him with a mixture of derision and incredulity.

When she came out he was bending over the trunk compartment of the Buick which had been backed out onto the apron, a few feet outside the garage door. The odor of garlic, he decided, had its source in or near that rear end.

"I have to pay the man for the chains." She strode angrily into the garage office, settled her bill.

The garageman switched off the light, followed her out curiously. "Take it easy on the bare cement, miss."

"Thanks." She was curt. "I won't be able to help myself."

The man in the mackinaw locked the door, went away. The girl tilted her chin up at the Demon.

"You want to drive, officer?"

"Uh, uh. You go ahead. I'll follow." The Demon waited until she climbed in back of the wheel. "Let me have your keys."

"*What for?*" That queer, panicky tone in her voice again.

"Check your trunk compartment." He held out his hand.

"I'll open it for you." She unlatched the door, tense, wary.

He shook his head. She gave him the keys. He closed the door again, went around back.

She watched him in the rear-view.

He used his left hand to manipulate the keys. The right fist went to his holster, came back loaded.

He got the lock open, swung up the lid.

A tarpaulin covered something bulky. He reached out, jerked at the canvas.

As he bent forward he caught the merest glimpse of a glitter on the chrome of the rear bumper beside his knees.

That wasn't all he caught.

His fur cap broke the blow. The force of it knocked him into the trunk compartment. He wrenched around, tried to bring his gun up. The glittering weapon smashed at his wrist. His fingers went numb. The .45 clattered against the bumper.

"*Help!*" The Demon half-rolled, half-slid to his knees, scrabbling in the slush for the automatic. The man above him clubbed him across the mouth.

The Demon kicked at trouser-clad shins, twisted toward his motorcycle. As he slithered sideways he had a good clear view of dark eyes blazing ferocity in a narrow, olive-skinned face, small lips drawn back wolfishly beneath a long nose. "*Help. . . Help!*"

The door of the cafe banged open. Voices calling. A scurry of feet.

The Buick roared, began to back.

"Come on!" screamed the girl.

Medini snatched at the .45: The car backed over it, kept him from grabbing the automatic. "Fix this cop, first." He lifted a nickel-plated hammerless, took careful aim.

The Demon scrunched behind Minnie's rear wheel. Livid flame spat at him. Metal rang loudly. Pain lanced at the side of his neck.

Medini swung on the running-board, snarling commands:

"Run over him! Run him down! Smash that machine!"

The Demon dived, slid on his face, clawed at the .45.

THE Buick had stopped, started forward, toward him. He propped

himself on his elbow, fired at the windshield. A cobweb of shattered glass spread out in front of the girl.

She swerved the Buick away, into the road. From the running-board, Medini's revolver barked twice more, like a threatening puppy, before the sedan sped out of range.

The Demon was straddling Minnie by the time a short-order cook in a stained apron and a stout man in a leather jacket reached him.

"*That's Medini!*" *Escaped con!*" He had no seconds to waste on explanations. "*Call state police!*" Minnie responded to the spark. He zoomed onto the highway.

It was rough going. His right wrist had no feeling in it at all. Might be a bone busted, he thought. He had to hold the .45 in his left. Minnie would have to take the bit in her teeth, practically steer herself.

"Saved my life, ole gal," he muttered, leaning his elbows on the handlebars. "If you hadn't deflected that pill, I'd be a sick boy right about now."

The Buick's tail-lights vanished over a crest. They might stop, over the hill, ambush him. Had to risk that. Probably wouldn't, wanting to get away from the hue and cry.

He fed Minnie power. She shivered, wobbled, when the speed indicator topped fifty.

"Cry sake," he grumbled. "Hit your fork, did he, Minnie?! Threw your sprockets out of kilter!" He held her at fifty.

When he topped the rise, there were no purplish tail-lights in sight. They couldn't have gained that much, could they?

They hadn't. At the foot of the hill, a wood road opened out. Headlights emerged from it, swung toward him, coming fast.

He flicked on his blinker, threw the siren on. The oncoming car stuck to the middle of the road. Then he knew.

They'd run him down. Head-on smack-up. Wouldn't damage the Buick too much to travel. But for the Demon to hit a car at this speed would be like jumping out a ten-story building and landing on the pavement.

He waited until the headlights were twenty feet away, heading way over on the wrong side of the road, pinning him. Then he flung himself to the left, let Minnie ride on her crash bar into the ditch.

The Buick lurched toward him, too late. The girl had to fight the wheel to keep the sedan on the road. The Demon crawled out of an icy puddle, rubbed the skid burns on his left hip, cursing futilely. He hauled Minnie back to the road, remounted, gave her the ethyl.

They'd come about three miles from One-Eyed Jack's; on the back track the Demon met only one pursuing car, a Mercury, driven by the man in the leather jacket. The Demon didn't even bother to wave him around; the Buick was out of sight again.

The Demon poured it on, whizzed past the neon-lit road-house with Minnie clattering like a Model *T* on a corduroy road.

"Old gray mare—ain't what she used t'be," he mumbled, through swollen lips. "Just hold together another ten, that's all I ask, Minnie. Then I'll turn you out t' pasture."

At the turn where he'd spotted the wet sign he saw the tail-lights again. Disappearing west, toward Placid.

He began to gain. Another half-mile. A yellow pencil of flame pointed at him from the right hand window. He couldn't hear the shot.

He waited another minute before he rested the barrel of the .45 on the

windshield and fired at the gas tank. He emptied the clip into the back of the car at tank level. Maybe there were sharpshooters who could hit a tire at sixty mph. But not the Demon. Not with his left hand—riding a bronc that shivered like one of those barber's massage gadgets.

He could have passed the Buick then. But he dropped into third, watched the iridescent film widening on the smooth satin of ice beneath his headlamp.

Minnie's affliction became suddenly aggravated. Her front wheel slewed wildly. He slowed to forty. The motorcycle threatened to shiver itself apart. He cut to thirty, to twenty-five, before he could handle her.

The tail-lights began to narrow together, draw away into the darkness of a long upgrade. At a bend, they blacked out momentarily. He didn't dare push Minnie too hard but in a quarter-mile, he caught sight of them again.

If he hadn't drilled those punctures low enough in the gas tank, they might still have enough fuel to escape. He kept his siren going full blast to inform any late wayfarer which way the chase was going.

The Buick hit the crest of the big hill a full mile ahead. When he got to the peak, he saw the loom of the headlights far below. They were swerving, turning. Maybe they meant to make another stab at crashing into him.

No! The car was in a skid. A long, sweeping slide. The gas had been used up. The motor'd died. They hadn't had power to use on the curve.

He was a hundred yards behind when the headlights dipped, somersaulted, lunged off into the darkness of the pine woods, came to rest, pointing up into the night from a deep gully.

He slurred Minnie around in the middle of the highway, kicked down the stand, left her chattering softly with her

blinker light still going. That would halt any passing traffic and tip off any of the troop cars that might be answering a phone from One-Eyed Jack's.

He plunged off into the soft, wet mulch of leaves and spruce needles—flashlight in his right hand, .45 in the fist he could depend on.

The Buick lay on its side, far below on the steep slope—the broken ice of a brook wriggling alongside it like a spotted snake. The Demon could see no sign of movement.

But after fifty yards of scratching his eyes out on thorny scrub and barking his shins on ice-coated boulders, he saw something that looked like a raveling of red yarn on the ice. It was above the car; it couldn't have dripped from the Buick.

Someone had been hurt, had managed to get out. It wasn't the girl. He could make out her blond curls tangled with the wheel where she lay slumped over, clamped in the wreckage.

The Demon kept rigidly quiet, heard nothing. He went on twenty steps, stopped again. There was no sound other than the whining of the wind in the evergreens, the lashing of sleet against branches. But through the aromatic pungency of the pines—the clean, fresh fragrance of the spruce—he caught the unmistakable odor of garlic.

MEDINI was coming toward him! Heading straight for the road—with the idea of kidnaping Minnie and riding her out of the danger zone!

The Demon knelt in the slime of sleety leaves and twigs and needles. The smell became stronger. He thumbed on the flashlight switch, threw the plastic tube down the slope. The cone of light turned and twisted like a landing beacon gone crazy.

The brusque bark of the .32 answered, but the Demon was dazzled by his own pyrotechnics. He couldn't see the finger of flame to shoot back.

The flashlight bounced off a tree, caromed onto a rock, slid a few feet, came to rest on its side—the beam half pointing toward the Demon!

A tapering evergreen, silhouetted against the luminous blur, became suddenly thinner at its base. A shadow; like that of a misshapen boulder, detached itself from the trunk.

The Demon held his automatic with both hands, sighted, fired.

The answering snarl was that of a wounded animal. The Demon crawled toward the sound. He couldn't see Medini. But there was no difficulty about smelling him.

The .45 held stiffly before him, the Demon inched nearer. The man might be playing 'possum.

Medini coughed—a harsh, strangling cough. “I told Katie—I should've taken time—to punch your ticket—back there at the joint—”

The Demon shoved the automatic against the killer's ribs, reached for the hammerless. The stench of garlic seemed overpowering. It didn't come from the man's breath. It was on the gun. It had been on Medini's right hand.

“How was it?” The Demon felt the soggy spot at the breast pocket of the coat the murderer wore. “Did Brad Wistor have a handful of garlic when you jumped him? Grab your gun? When you shot him? That how it went?”

“The hat,” the dying man said painfully. “The hat Katie brought me—too big.” He struggled to sit up, succeeded only in rolling to his side. “Tried to grab a hat from that runty grocer. He put up a battle—had to give it—to him.”

“How’d you get by the road-block, Medini?”

“Hid—trunk compartment. Lifted lid—jumped out. Got back in other side.” He coughed again, weakly. “Get me—to a doc!”

“And leave your girl, like that?”

“She’s gone,” Medini gasped.

You won’t be far behind her, the Demon thought. But he said: “We’ll do what we can for you—Minnie and I.”

But by the time he’d checked on the girl to make sure she was beyond help, and had lugged Medini up to the highway, a patrol coupe came screaming in from the south.

Cap Matthews got out, cradling a submachine gun in his left elbow. Two other troopers piled down the hill to the sedan.

The Demon had his say.

When he’d done, the Captain grunted approval. “Not bad, for a one-man job. Not bad.” He regarded the Demon critically. “We’ll take the bodies in. You look a little blue around the gills. Better stop in somewhere and have something good and hot. There’s a nice spaghetti joint, couple miles south.”

“Not for me:” The Demon shook his head. “I’ve had all the garlic I can take, for one day.”